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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABUJA 001955

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [SOCI](#) [NI](#) [AID](#)

SUBJECT: KANO STATE GOVERNOR STRATEGY TO IMPLEMENT POLIO
VACCINATION PROGRAM

CLASSIFIED BY CHARGE ROGER MEECE. REASONS 1.5 (B) AND (D).

11. (C) During a November 3 courtesy call on Kano State Governor Ibrahim Shekarau, the CDA expressed concern about reports that polio vaccination programs in the state have stalled. The CDA noted that allegations from various quarters about impure vaccine, Western efforts to use vaccines to render recipients infertile and the like, are at best badly misinformed or being put forward by people with other agendas. In either case, it would be a tragedy for children to suffer and polio to spread as a result. The Governor nodded and took the CDA aside for a private word out of earshot of all but his Deputy.

12. (C) The Governor quickly and firmly expressed his understanding of the health problem and his support for the vaccination program. He noted, however, that he confronted a political problem. With allegations coming from various quarters, he could not simply impose a view, and in any event that would not result in troubled parents coming forward with their children. Complicating the picture, he noted that the vaccination program had in a number of cases recruited young men as vaccinators who were identified by local residents as unemployed ruffians, further reinforcing doubts about the vaccination program's bona fides. Therefore, he explained, he designated a committee, including experts and others likely to be sympathetic, to study the issue and produce an authoritative report. The report is expected very soon, but the Governor acknowledged that he had a pretty good idea of its content already. As expected, it would not find any evidence to support allegations that the vaccines contained substances planted by Western interests to render children infertile, or anything else substantiating criticism of the program. The Governor also broadly hinted that he has been consulting with other leaders in the State to be able to ensure a successful program once the report has been published.

13. (C) The Charge observed that given accusations of Western bad intentions, it would not necessarily be productive to issue public statements on the subject from the U.S. Embassy. He observed, however, that it would be useful for UNICEF, the State Government, and other concerned stakeholders to coordinate a public information program that would address as fully as possible concerns and questions. The Governor agreed, and pointed out that traditional leaders should play a role. The Charge also emphasized that the U.S. Mission would welcome any suggestions or thoughts the Governor or his staff might have as to how the U.S. could be most helpful.

14. (U) USAID Nigeria continues to work closely with the Federal Ministry of Health, the Northern Governors, and State Ministries of Health and Civil Society to address the polio issues. USAID has supported the participation of Northern States' traditional rulers to emphasize the critical importance of eradicating polio in Nigeria. In September 2002, the traditional rulers signed a communique to support the eradication of polio in Nigeria and they agreed to allow their communities to participate in the National Immunization Days (NIDs) held during the holy month of Ramadan. Subsequent to the signing, issues arose prompting the states to reassess their participation in NIDs in the north. USAID funds and implements training of the vaccinator teams and supervisors for NIDs in eight of the most seriously polio endemic states in the north, including Kano, the epicenter of the polio epidemic. USAID also leads the National Social Mobilization Committee of the National Program on Immunization and has forged close relationships with the Kano state Government as a result of USAID's child survival activities in nine of the 44 local government areas (LGAs) in the state. These efforts led to a decrease in the number of wild polio cases recorded until recently when resurgence was noted and the number of cases increased. As a result of the latest outbreaks, the donors, including USAID,

have encouraged the FMOH and states to refocus their efforts on greater state and community LGAs. Kano has now adopted the USAID approach to primary health care to children under five for their entire state, including a component for the state's approach to polio eradication.

15. (C) Comment: The Governor's understanding of the problem and personal commitment to the polio vaccination program seems clear. We understand that the next round of polio vaccinations is scheduled to get underway in December in Kano State. According to press reports, the Governor's committee report may be out by the end of this week, providing a good local basis for a strong public push as to the need and benefits of the vaccinations. It seems clear that at least some of those throwing up the allegations know better and have no real interest in the campaign per se, but are opportunistically seizing on the program and people's fears for their own narrow interests.

End comment.
MEECE